

Are You Listening?!

If I'm hearing, it's what I get out of it. If I'm listening, it's what you get out of it.

After years and years of helping married couples and preparing engaged couples for marriage, the biggest obstacle to overcome in all marriages is "how couples listen to each other." The dating days are probably some of the best days, months and years of a couple's life because everything we say to each other during those courting days is important, soaked in and during that time you really want to listen and probably really feel listened to. But you know what happens from there – kids, jobs, homes, financial pressures, family commitments, social engagements begin to fill our days and lives and to be honest, sometimes we just don't listen to each other anymore. Being listened to is perhaps more important than any other single factor in a good marriage.

On a simple request like your spouse has asked you to take out the trash. The first thing you want to do is repeat that back to her and ask, "Honey do you need me to do that right now or can I do it later when I have a minute?" This very simple step of repeating the question and then getting her feedback can save you from a monumental disagreement. The husband is definitely going to take out the trash, but usually it's when he wants to do it. By repeating it back to her, means you have really listened. You're both on the same page. Try this simple technique when communicating with each other.

Do you listen with your motor running? Especially if it's a topic that both of you might have your feathers ruffled on. While your spouse is talking, your formulating your own defense and answers, which means you're not really listening. Listening entails experiencing something of what the other person is going through. If you tend to start to formulate your answer in your head, or think "Man, I've heard this before," it probably means you've never heard it before. Listening means that you are interested in the other person.

Listening is not a passive experience.

If the other person is doing all the talking and I'm just refraining from setting up barriers to the flow, I'm not listening. To listen I have to be positively involved in what he/she is communicating. I may be hearing with my ears, but not really listening. I may be doing dishes (multi-tasking), reading the paper or moving around the house. The one talking knows I'm not really listening. The communicator wants the all of you – and wants you to be absorbed in this conversation.

Listening is not something that can turned on and off like a faucet.

I have to prepare myself for it. I have to build up within me a sense of looking forward to being with the other person, an active interest in becoming more aware of what's going on inside of him or her; an eagerness to be closer to that person.

Listening is not only avoiding interruptions and letting the other say what he wants to say.

Listening is more than paying attention. Actually, it's being attentive to the other person. Stay close to the person and touch. A touch can show the other person that I'm really present in this conversation.

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Truly it's not easy to be a good listener. Life is full of activity, entertainment and multi-tasking. If I'm hearing, it's what I get out of it. If I'm listening, it's what you get out of it. How much you get out of it determines how effective my listening is.

Listening does not happen by accident. Couples have to concentrate on it. Practice new skills and remind each other (gently) that you can get better at it. Begin to build new listening skills today.

Questions to talk about:

How does your spouse show by body language that he/she is listening to you?

How does your spouse show that he/she is listening to you?

When I know my spouse has listened to me, I feel (describe your reactions as fully as possible)...

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